



# The Augur

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## DID DOMITIAN ISSUE ANY JUDAEA CAPTA COINS?

by Mel Wacks NLG

*Thanks to BNS member Dan Friedenberg for bringing up this intriguing question.*

When the Judean Revolt broke out in 66 AD, Domitian was only fifteen years old. The youngest son of Vespasian played no part in the victory of the Roman forces, led first by his father and then commanded by his older brother Titus when Vespasian became Emperor in 69 AD. However, the young Domitian did take part in the Judaea Capta victory procession, as described by Josephus:

"Most of the spoils that were carried were heaped up indiscriminately, but more prominent than all the rest were those captured in the Temple at Jerusalem — a golden table weighing several hundredweight, and a lampstand similarly made of gold...After these was carried the Jewish Law, the last of the spoils. Next came a large group carrying images of Victory, all fashioned of ivory and gold. Behind them drove Vespasian first with Titus behind him; Domitian rode alongside, magnificently adorned himself, and with his horse a splendid sight."

The afore described scene took place in the year 70, when Domitian was still a teenager. Vespasian served as Emperor until his death in 79 AD, whereupon Titus reigned briefly for about two years. There was an extensive issue of gold, silver and bronze Judaea Capta coins struck under Vespasian and Titus...but did Domitian continue this series? The basic fact that he played no part in the Roman victory over the Jews would not have been a major deterrent to striking Judaea Capta coins...since Domitian did mint numerous coins proclaiming Germania Capta after the defeat of his armies there! After a similar defeat whereupon the Emperor's forces concluded a disgraceful peace treaty with the Dacians, followed by a pompous report of "victory" to the Senate, Pliny the Younger said that "the triumphs of Domitian were always evidence of some advantages gained by the enemies of Rome."

Let us now examine the numismatic evidence. There is only a single example of a true Judaea Capta coin having been assigned to Domitian's eleventh consulship (85 AD). This bronze sestertius depicts a Jewess seated on the ground, together with a Roman soldier standing near a trophy. The coin was first published by Lavy in the catalog

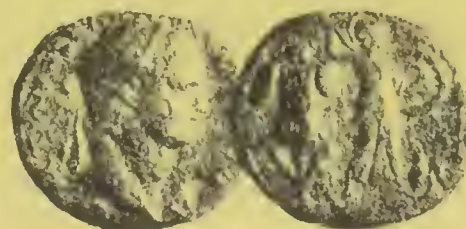
of the Musee de Turin. Cohen lists it as number 318, but indicates that the coin is possibly a hybrid, e.g. an old Judaea Capta reverse die was mistakenly matched with a Domitianian obverse. Madden also lists this same coin. But, unfortunately, in no instance is this important coin illustrated. Thus, I would have to agree with Cohen who wrote over a century ago that this was a hybrid, mistakenly produced.

Next, there is a series of bronze coins minted in Judaea by Domitian. All but one of these "victory" types feature either Nike (Victory) holding a wreath, Minerva carrying a shield, a Roman soldier or a trophy. The critical difference between these victory coins struck in Palestine and the Judaea Capta coins struck there by Vespasian and Titus is that the earlier group were inscribed in Greek (Judaea Capta), while Domitian's Palestine issues carry no specific references to the country — they are inscribed with VICTORIA AVG plus Domitian's Imperial titles.



Judaea Capta bronze of Titus struck in Palestine

### Coin-of-the-Month



Bronze of Domitian struck in Palestine. No legend on reverse; helmeted Minerva, turning to the right and standing on a galley, holding javelin in her right hand and a round shield in the left. An owl is at her feet, to the right, and a trophy is on the left.



As Daniel Friedenberg suggests, it is likely that this series of Domitian refers to his so-called victory in Germany. The fact that they were struck in Judaea is irrelevant since it was common for numerous mints in all parts of the Roman Empire to take part in producing commemorative issues. As a matter of fact, while the Judaea Capta pieces of Vespasian and Titus were principally minted in Rome, some of their Judaea Capta coins were also struck as far away as Lugdunum (Gaul) and Tarraco (Spain).

However, there does seem to be at least one Judaeian reference coin struck by Domitian during his sixteenth consulship (81 AD). The design features a palm tree... the distinctive seven-branched palm tree that was used by Jews to signify the holy seven-branched Temple menorah. There can be little doubt that this bronze not only was struck in Judaea, but specifically refers to that small beleaguered country. This would be the most significant coin of Domitian to include in a collection of the coins of the Holy Land.



Domitian's reign began with moderation and a display of justice, but he soon gave himself up to every excess and plunged into the most degrading vices. He assumed the titles of Lord and God, and claimed to be a son of Minerva (explaining this goddess's predominance on his Judaeian coinage). After his death, the Senate took the unusual action of issuing a decree that Domitian's name should be struck out of the Roman annals and obliterated from every public monument. Thus was the ignoble fate of the last Flavian ruler of Rome.

## MORE ON THE SHROUD OF TURIN

In issue 18 of *The Augur*, a feature article revealed the possibility of coin images appearing on the famous Shroud of Turin. The authors Dr. Eric Jumper, Dr. John Jackson and Kenneth Stevenson, Jr. wrote that "In an attempt to identify the kinds of things that might well be on the eyes of a dead man, we consulted Jewish burial customs prevalent at the time of Jesus and found that it was customary for the Jews to place objects (potsherds — pottery fragments — or coins) over the eyes of their dead."

Indeed, a recent article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Ancient Burial Customs Preserved in Jericho Hills by Rachel Hachlili, July/August 1979) reveals the discovery of coins used in the precise manner as were hypothesized by the Shroud of Turin researchers. Hachlili writes:

"Two coins were found with coffin burials, one dating to the reign of the Hasmonean king, John Hyrcanus II (63-40 BC) and a second from the time of Archelaus (4 BC-6 AD). Two additional coins of Herod Agrippa I (41-44 AD) were found in a skull. The coins originally must have been placed on the eyes of the deceased as a vestige of the pagan custom to pay Charon, the guardian of the River Styx where, according to Greek mythology, the dead must cross in order to arrive at their ultimate destination."

## Religious Character of Ancient Coins by Professor J. Zimmerman

### Part II

So scrupulously guarded was the religious character of the coinage of the Greeks in placing the images of their deities upon their money that it was not until after the death of Alexander the Great that the effigy of a human being received this distinction. Nor did Alexander himself, with all his overreaching worldwide ambition, presume to usurp the place reserved for the gods by placing his own image there, for though he was a supplanter of kings and the rulers of earth, he did not attempt to supplant deities. He did dare to discard from the face of his coins the well-known effigies of the hereditary gods Ares and Apollo, and substituted those of Pallas, Herakles, and the Zeus of Olympia, but he refrained from introducing his own. It was not until after he had completed his brilliant earthly career and passed from the eyes of men that his apotheosis took place, and when dazzled by his seeming superhuman achievements the people assigned him a place amongst the gods, it was only a logical sequence that Lysimachus and Ptolemy gave him the supreme and divine distinction by placing his somewhat idealized portrait upon their coins, although Pallas was retained on the reverse of the former and Zeus was enthroned on the reverse of the latter, so that the gods still retained their ancient seats upon the money of the Greek world.



**Tetradrachm of Lysimachus, King of Thrace,  
with posthumous portrait of Alexander the Great**

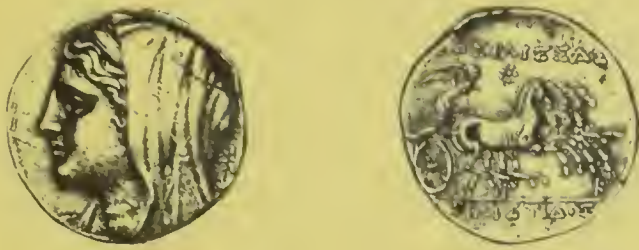
For a long time the most ambitious rulers did not contest the undisputed sway of the gods in maintaining their symbols and effigies upon the coinage of Ancient Greece. Even Agathocles, the famous tyrant of Syracuse, and contemporary of Alexander the Great, who dared to do many extravagant things, did not have the temerity to place his image upon the coins he issued, and for a time he even refrained from putting his own name, but stamped them with the name of the great city, and it was not until after his signal victory over the Carthaginians in Africa, in 310 B.C., that he substituted his own name for that of Syracuse.

Whilst the apotheosis, or elevation of Alexander the Great to a place hitherto reserved for deities, was an innovation in history, yet the process was a gradual one achieved through years of brilliant conquests that seemed to justify his bold claim to be the son of Zeus Ammon, and this made his ascendancy to a place among the gods quite natural; hence the people found no fault when they saw his portrait on the tetradrachm substituted for the long familiar Libyan god.

From this period begins a long and interesting portrait gallery of many of the rulers of the Greek world, whose images occupy the obverse of the coins, whilst the reverse is generally reserved for the effigies or symbols of the deities.



The same general custom was followed by the Romans, who stamped their coins with the portraits of rulers and distinguished women of the court, but on the reverse they often gave place to the effigies and names of their gods and goddesses.



**Queen Philistis, wife of Hiero II of Syracuse, the first portrait of a woman to appear on a coin, 274-216 B.C.**

It was the great calamity of history that befell the Jews when their temple and city were destroyed in the year 70, and everywhere they read the record of that awful disaster, "JUDAEA CAPTA," upon the coins of Vespasian and his son and successor, Titus. But a gross insult was added to that injury when the Emperor Vespasian and his successors for many years imposed upon them a special tribute for rebuilding and maintaining the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. The Emperor ordered the Jews, in whatever country they might be, to pay for this purpose the sum of two drachma, or two denarii, the equivalent of the half-shekel that they had hitherto paid to the support of their holy temple in Jerusalem. To the pious Jew this was a quasi-enforced idolatry, and many were the efforts at times to escape it.



**Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus depicted on a Roman denarius, 43 B.C.**

We can easily understand what a shocking outrage this must have been to the religious sensibilities of the previously oppressed Jews, who, suffering from the loss of their temple and worship, were now forced to do what seemed like the very climax of sacrilege: to contribute to the support of a temple and its worship the very name of which was an abhorrence to the Hebrews. The temple of Jupiter, on the Capitoline Hill, seems to rise again from the wrecks of the distant centuries, and gives us vivid and realistic impressions of the political and religious state of the Jew in his relation to the Gentile world, as we study one of the coins of Vespasian, Titus, or Domitian that bears an excellent representation of this most venerated building in Rome for the Romans, but the most profane to the faithful Hebrew. But how different this coin appeared to the religious consciousness of the oppressed Jew as he looked upon it; for it was inseparable from the saddest associations, and many suffered shameful humiliations from the severe and revolting measures enforced by Domitian. On the accession of the humane Nerva, however, the most disgraceful usages and malicious perversions of justice in gaining the necessary information for imposing the tax were abolished. The Roman Senate

struck a special coin on which they commemorated this noble act, thus making it a most interesting historical monument. Nothing makes those distant times so real and brings them so near as when I study attentively these contemporaneous coins, for they are also contemporaneous and unrevised monuments.



I have another most interesting coin that shows the humiliating and oppressed condition of the Jews after their disastrous efforts to throw off the Roman yoke under the leadership of Bar Cochba. That unsuccessful endeavour, from A.D. 132-135, involved his own race in the greatest misfortunes. The Jewish power was crushed. They were forbidden to enter the city of Jerusalem on pain of death, and in shameful contempt for them a figure of a swine was placed over the Bethlehem gate. We can easily realize this fact when we examine an earlier coin struck by the Tenth Legion Fratensis at Jerusalem, where Titus originally stationed them to guard the place after the destruction of the city, for on that coin we have a confirmation, in the figure of the swine and the letters "L.X.F." stamped upon it. Imagine the feelings of a Jew paid in such money, even if it were the legionary symbol. There were other types no less offensive to him, but often there was no alternative, for money was a necessity for the Jew as well as for the Gentile.



**Swine on a Roman denarius of Vespasian**

The early Christians were embarrassed with the same religious character of the money, for they were obliged to use for the most sacred purposes of their holy religion the gold, silver and bronze coins of imperial Rome and Greece that bore the images and types of a pagan mythology which they repudiated.

Let us endeavour to picture to our minds the actual situation of the Christians in that early period, for by the aid of their contemporary numismatic monuments and the background of history, we are enabled to bridge over the intervening centuries, and by seeing the portraits of their rulers and the images of the gods they worshipped, and by reading the divine names that royalty arrogated to itself, we seem to become eyewitnesses of Christianity's early struggles with heathenism, for I know of nothing that gives such vivid realism as these ancient coins. The autocratic emperors, with despotic power as the viceregents of the gods upon earth, received apotheosis after death, and by this official act of deification they were enthroned to heavenly seats and given rank among the gods, and henceforth worship was offered to them and to their images as to the divinities of Rome, and this was the state religion, and was imposed upon all. The early and most



bitter conflicts between Christianity and paganism arose when the converts to Christ refused to pay the homage to the emperor that was due alone to Deity, and in Pergamus, Smyrna, and Ephesus they protested at the sacrifice of their lives, for it was treason to withhold that homage, although the penalty was not always enforced.

The Christians, as members of the state, came continually in conflict with the pagan requirements and their personal religious convictions, for to refuse to swear by the genius of the emperor would be so pronounced as to be designated by their enemies as open treason, but to conform would have been idolatry and apostasy from their faith. They often found themselves in this embarrassing situation, for Caesar worship was a fundamental part of the institutions of the empire. There was religious freedom in the sense that there was no objection as to their particular religious belief and the gods that they worshipped, so long as it did not interfere with the moral and political well-being of the state. But just as they were obliged in the time of Christ to accept that silver denarius bearing the effigy of Tiberius, with his august title as pontifex maximus, thereby acknowledging his sovereignty, in like manner they were required to give outward and public acknowledgment to Caesar worship, although done with mental reservation, for there were many temples throughout the empire for this cult.



"Tribute Penny" of Tiberius

Whilst the Christians technically made themselves liable to treason against the state by not conforming to the Caesar worship, the rigid letter of the law was not generally enforced until the third century, when the most bitter persecutions were waged. However, in the preceding years many were put to death, although the number of martyrs was comparatively small, and all the Christians who suffered death throughout the Roman empire are not to be compared with the great number who suffered death under the cruel slaughter by the Duke of Alva in that small country of the Netherlands when, according to the estimate of that celebrated jurist Hugo Grotius, not less than 100,000 perished for their Christian faith, and no such work of religious extermination had ever been suffered by the Christians during the reign of all the pagan emperors of the Roman empire.

During all those years the Christians were obliged to receive and pay out the current money for daily necessities, as well as for the worship of their holy religion, and they must have often suffered as they saw upon it the portraits of the rulers who at times persecuted them with barbarous cruelty. Some of them, like Antiochus Epiphanes, the mad Syrian king, had the audacity to usurp the place of divinity upon his coins while living by designating himself as god.



Tetradrachm of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes)  
struck at Akko-Ptolemais

How great interest centers in the large tetradrachm of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) as we study the well-defined portrait of this infuriated Syrian king on his own coin, and read the wicked audacity in his inscriptions, for he dares to call himself "God," and as we examine this ancient and realistic portrait, and read the inscription, and study them in the light of history, we appreciate the shocking irreverence of this monster of cruelty as we follow him in the year 168 B.C., when he invaded Judaea, captured the city of Jerusalem and desecrated the holy temple with the outrageous insult of a mad demon: the sacred writings were burned, whilst to reach the very climax of sacrilege, a swine was slaughtered within the sacred precincts of the temple itself, and "the broth of its filthy flesh sprinkled, amidst shouts of laughter, on the sacred parchments."

How vividly, and with what intense realism, that monster character of history and this awful scene of sacrilege is brought to our minds as we study the face in connection with his contemporaneous record; stamped on his own coin, and by his own order.

But it was common for the Roman emperors, and even empresses, to receive apotheosis after death, and then instead of the usual titles that they once bore the name of god was given them. What a shocking incongruity when applying such a divine title to Nero or Commodus, who were celebrated for vice and cruel, bloodthirsty deeds, for instead of being divine they were not always human, but at times most inhuman, and if after their decease they became worthy to be elevated to the rank of their deities then a marvellous transformation must needs have taken place in their transit, for otherwise it would reflect great discredit upon the character of the gods of imperial Rome.

An overscrupulous pastor of one of our churches who received a donation of \$220.00 is said to have declined five of the double eagle pieces because they had been made from the St. Gaudens die and lacked the sacred motto that President Roosevelt decided to omit from the new gold pieces, but what would he have done had he been pastor of a struggling church in the Roman empire, with all his salary paid in money that bore the effigies of pagan gods, and the images of emperors claiming to be gods? Accepting \$20.00 gold pieces without the motto "In God we trust" is not to be compared with the trying situation of the early Church in Rome.



Saint-Gaudens Double Eagles — 1907 without motto  
and later issue with motto "IN GOD WE TRUST"

*To be continued*